

NATO Defense Ministers Back U.S.-Soviet Arms Pact

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BRUSSELS, May 16 — The defense ministers of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization today welcomed the "agreement in principle" between the Soviet Union and the United States on limiting long-range missiles and bombers, saying that the treaty will "improve the security of Europe."

Defense Secretary Harold Brown said at a news conference at the end of the ministers' two-day meeting that Senate rejection of the treaty would raise "considerable concern" in Europe about "the cohesion and continuity of American leadership." The reaction, he said, would be one of consternation and would make relations with the allies more difficult.

Mr. Brown said that rejection of the treaty would lead to an "all-out arms race" between the two superpowers. The United States could respond to the challenge, he said, but the world situation would be more dangerous and defense costs much higher as a result.

Brown Sees Impact on the Senate

He said he believed the debate in the Senate would be affected by the Western alliance's "significant conclusion," which was expressed in a communiqué issued at the end of the meeting.

The defense ministers sat as the alliance's Defense Planning Committee, which is made up of representatives of the member nations that take part in joint defense arrangements. It excludes Iceland, which has no armed forces, as well as France and Greece, which no longer participate in the alliance's defense function.

The Defense Secretary said the defense ministers had described the treaty as an "equitable limitation" of both Soviet and United States capabilities. He also assured the alliance on American ability to verify Soviet compliance with the treaty.

Some West Europeans have expressed doubts about the United States' ability to monitor the number of warheads carried by Soviet missiles and to judge the quality of the guidance systems on Soviet missiles. One European said he had been confident of the American ability to obtain such information until the closing earlier this year of the monitoring stations in northern Iran.

Brown Says U.S. Can Compensate

Mr. Brown said there were various ways of compensating for the loss of these stations. The United States, he said, is having talks with a number of allied countries, including Turkey, to obtain rights for surveillance planes to fly in their airspace. Prime Minister Ecevit of Turkey said yesterday that such flights would not violate Soviet sovereignty. Previously a Foreign Ministry statement in Ankara said that Turkey would agree to such flights provided the Soviet Union had no objection.

Secretary Brown said United States means of verifying Soviet compliance did not rest on a single system, but on data gathered and correlated by many sites and techniques. It costs the United States several billion dollars yearly to maintain these systems, he said.

NATO Modernization Is Endorsed

Mr. Brown also said Western Europe faced a "new and expanded threat" as a result of the deployment of a Soviet mobile missile known as the SS-20. Referring to the Soviet missile, today's communiqué said: "For the first time a weapon on the continental scale can reach all the territories of Western Europe with multiple warheads from mobile launchers in the Soviet Union."

The Secretary, endorsing modernization of the alliance's missile forces, said the arms limitation treaty with the Soviet Union did not inhibit extending the range

of the Pershing, an intermediate missile that now has a range of 450 miles.

On other matters, the ministers devoted a good deal of time to Soviet air and sea operations outside the alliance's area of operations, which is bounded on the south by the Tropic of Cancer and on the east by Turkey's eastern frontier.

Mr. Brown, asked about common actions to secure the alliance's lines of communications, said that the United States "bears the bulk of the burden" for "keeping world shipping lanes open against the threat of attack."

The United States also plays a unique role in the Middle East and has been able to act as a mediator there, Mr. Brown said. The United States accepts this role, he added, but seeks from its allies "sympathetic understanding, political cooperation and, to the extent possible, a willingness to share in the defense burdens, worldwide, that the United States has undertaken."